

TRIBUTE TO FALLEN CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

Remarks by State Treasurer Phil Angelides
Annual Memorial Service for Slain Correctional Officers
October 26, 2001

First of all, let me say that it is my deep honor to be with each and every one of you here today. I want to particularly thank Don and John for thinking of me and asking me to be with you on this very special day, at this beautiful memorial, that honors those who have served this State and this society so bravely.

I want to acknowledge the families, friends, and co-workers of those who have fallen in the service of their State. It is my privilege to honor the 28 men and women who died defending our freedom, keeping our society safe, and ensuring that we have the domestic tranquility that is the basis for any democracy.

I would like to particularly acknowledge the families who are here today: the family of Sergeant Howell Burchfield, who died in San Quentin in 1985; the family of Les Macarro, who was slain in 1988; and the family of Ineasie Baker, the last sworn officer killed in the line of duty.

To their families and to their memories, I say on behalf of the State of California: Thank you. Thank you for what you have done to preserve democracy and freedom.

It is very difficult to express the gratitude that a society should hold for those who have served in the most difficult of capacities, dealing with the most difficult of circumstances, maintaining public safety and order.

I am reminded of the words of Abraham Lincoln, who searched very hard to comfort the mother of five sons, all of whom had died in the service of their country in the Civil War. His words, in many ways, express my feelings today.

He said, in a letter to Mrs. Bixby on November 21st, 1864:

"I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to serve. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

That is what these 28 men and women did to maintain order, safety and stability in our democracy in California.

The question before us today is: How do we honor these brave men and women and their memory, particularly in the context of an America after September 11th which has been racked with tragedy and is coming to grips with the fact that our safety is under threat?

We have come to a recognition that should have been there all along - and has been there among those who serve the public - that there is an essential role for the public realm to play in maintaining the life blood of this democracy. We now know, as we always should have known, that we rely on people in the public realm to teach our children, to keep our streets safe, and to perform other essential duties in our society. We know now, more than ever, that a strong public sector is essential to maintaining a strong democracy and a strong private sector.

So we honor these men and women by rededicating ourselves to the notion that public service - with the dangers and challenges inherent therein - is fundamental to the thriving of our democracy.

Over the last three decades, we have too often debunked the role of people in public service, from teachers to peace officers, and the essential role that they play in our communities. Now we know, as we always should have known, that we depend on the bravery and the dedication of our public servants.

So let us dedicate ourselves again, as a country, to telling young people that the best thing they can do with their lives is to be in the public service. Let us dedicate ourselves again to ensuring that public servants are not only valued by society, but are given the kind of compensation and rewards that allow them to support their families with dignity and grace. We honor those who fell by recognizing their sacrifice and imbuing in this society a sense of the honor of public service.

It has been said that a hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself. Clearly, these 28 men and women gave their lives to something bigger than themselves. They gave their lives to maintain public order, so that we could have a free and democratic society. They served the public and let us, therefore, honor their public service.

Thank you for having me with you today. To the families and friends of these brave 28 men and women, I give you my respect and my prayers for your loved ones.

Thank you.